THE PREVAILING THEORY of the origin of the week holds that the days appear to be named after the planets. Weekdays do bear the names of the seven wandering stars (*planetes*) of the late or classical age of antiquity; but the order is wrong. An alternate theory supports the premise that the names of the planets were in fact adopted from the names of gods.

For instance, did Mercury – celestial messenger, god of script and measure (in Egypt) – lend his name to the first planet in the solar system, or take it from the name given to the planet? The terms Mercury, Hermes, Thoth *et al*, recur throughout antiquity in what appear to be celestial contexts, leaving the impression that ancient astronomer-priests had obviously intended a planetary association. Yet Mercury is notoriously difficult to detect with the naked eye…

> "*Mercury, the nearest planet to the sun, has* [supposedly] *been known from prehistoric times, though most persons have never seen it. There is a tradition indeed that even Copernicus never did. This is due to the fact that, since its orbit is far inside that of the Earth, its angular distance from the Sun never exceeds 28°. This last occurs when the planet comes to aphelion at greater elongation; when near perihelion it would be nearly 18°. Again, as Mercury is always near the ecliptic, it will best be seen when the latter is most nearly perpendicular to the horizon. This occurs for middle northern latitudes after sunset near the spring equinox and before sunrise near the fall equinox. Even then, by the time darkness has fallen, the planet is quite near the horizon or has set. So no one can ever observe Mercury under favourable night conditions, in fact the best observations* [*ie*, today, using the telescope] *are made in full daylight when the planet is higher in the sky.*"
> [CHARLES OLIVER 'Mercury' *in* ENCYCLOPEDIA AMERICANA VOLUME XVIII, pp667/8]

To add context, consider how long it took to recognize that morning-star *Eosphorus*, and evening-star *Hesperus*, were in actuality the same planet, Venus – the credit for which traditionally goes to Parmenides (*ca* 512–400 BC). Which corresponds with the classical era of astronomical enlightenment.

> "*The first* [Babylonian] *list of stars which used the signs of the zodiac to describe their positions is dated about 410* BC. *Later, the Greeks used the signs of the zodiac. As far as we know, the first Greek astronomers to use it were Meton and Euctemon, about 430* BC." [THURSTON *Early Astronomy*, p66]

The numerous mathematical tablets which survive from Mesopotamia, date from the Old Babylonian Empire, while astronomical works appear restricted to the later Chaldean period.

> "*Cuneiform tablets with mathematical contents are known to us mostly from the so-called 'Old Babylonian' period, about 1600* BC. *No astronomical texts of any scientific significance exist from this period, while the mathematical texts show the highest level ever attained in Babylonia. The second period from which we have a larger number of texts is the latest period of Babylonian history, when Mesopotamia had become a part of the empire of Alexander's successors, the 'Seleucids'. This period, from about 300* BC *to the beginning of our era, has furnished us with a great number of astronomical texts of a most remarkable mathematical character, fully comparable to the astronomy of the* Almagest." [NEUGEBAUER *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, p14]

Astronomical data from the older Egyptian remains are likewise sparse:

> "*In summary, from the almost three millennia of Egyptian writing, the only texts which have come down to us and deal with a numerical prediction of astronomical phenomena belong to the Hellenistic or Roman period. None of the earlier astronomical documents* [*eg*, coffin texts] *contain mathematical elements; they are crude observational schemes, partly religious, partly practical in purpose.*

> *Ancient science was the product of a very few men; and these few happened not to be Egyptians.*" [NEUGEBAUER *op cit,* p91]

All available data point to the classical age as the period of greatest ferment in ancient astronomy and celestial mechanics.

> "*By about 300* BC *the Babylonians had developed very successful theories for the motions of the planets, Sun, and Moon. These theories were based upon arithmetic rules, rather than on the geometrical models that characterized the Greek approach. When the Greeks began to deal quantitatively with planetary theory, they were able to base their geometrical models on numerical parameters borrowed from the Babylonians. This process was well underway in the second century* BC." [EVANS & BERGGREN *Geminos: Introduction to the Phenomena,* pp14/5]

Yet the names of the seven planets – or ancient gods who resided in the sky – arose at least two millennia earlier. Might these names refer to celestial phenomena other than planets?

It has long been known that the names of Greek days of the month were drawn from the phases of the Moon, but no one has yet ventured a similar explanation for the names of the days of the week. Naming the phases – or better yet, giving each lunar phase its own characteristic letter of the alphabet – facilitates extended measurement of the lunar cycle: the name or character entered into the appropriate square on a blank calendar leaf, preserving a continuous record of the irregularities among lunations.

> "*Reckoning the days* [of the month] *by the Moon means for the names of the days to be in conformity with the phases of the Moon, for the names of the days were named for the phases of the Moon. Thus, on the day the Moon appears new, it* [the day] *was named, by contraction,* noumenia [*new month*]; *on the day it makes its second*

> *appearance they call it 'second'; and they call the phase of the Moon occurring at the middle of the month* dichomenia [*dividing the month*] *from this circumstance. And in general they named all the days for the phases of the Moon; thus they also called the thirtieth day of the month, which is last,* triakas, *from this very circumstance.*"
> [GEMINOS (88–36 BC) *Introduction to the Phenomena,* p177]

Historians – not excluding the classical Greek thinkers – have long sought to interpret the ancient texts involving gods, in cosmological (largely planetary) terms, but rarely in express relation to lunar mechanics.

There are only seven *identifiable* lunar phases in each lunation. Phases surrounding these identifiable Spectres lack distinguishable features affording recognition. The seven 'gods' of the lunation include: waxing crescent (3); waxing half-moon (9); first full moon (15); second full moon (16); first waning phase (on day 17 in the cycle); waning half-moon (23); and the waning crescent (29/30) – *ie,* opposing crescents, opposed half-moons, twin full moons and the abominable herald of advancing decay. (The rest of the lunar Spectres are notoriously difficult to identify on sight.)

Their theophanies in the Egyptian and Greek pantheons incorporate (in order): Horus (Ares) the avenger brandishing his crescent-like sword; Thoth (Hermes) god of script and just measure; Amon (Apollo) the luminous one; Ra (Zeus) *the brightest one* – mistaken by scholars and historians as far back as the classical Greek age, for *the Sun;* Set (Poseidon) *infernal* god of the briny depths [*cf,* Satan]; Ptah (Hephæstus) the celestial smith; and Osiris (Hades / Pluto) embodying the crescentine phallus with which he impregnates the lunar goddess residing in the underworld (Isis / Demeter) on his demise, to beget the new lunation.

Each lunation begins anew with Osiris's 'son' Horus rising to avenge the death of a father at the infernal hands of Set (precipitant of the downfall of the terminal 'god' and other waning phases, by initiating the waning arc of the cycle).

The Week, in other words, conjoined the dominant theophanies of the lunation in an 'archangelic' hierarchy (not unlike the Christian godhead fused in Trinity). And the names of most of the planets arise from this divine pantheon as well: Ares (*Mars*); Hermes (*Mercury*); Set (*Saturn*); and Zeus (*Jupiter*). Given that Venus is a late Roman deity (whose earliest known temple in Rome was consecrated in 295 BC), it remains to consider whether prior references to the evanescent goddess Venus – Ninlil mother of the moongod (in Sumeria), Isis (in Egypt), Ishtar (in Babylonia), Astarte (in Phœnicia) and Demeter or Aphrodite (in Greece) – might not in fact invoke the lunar goddess in her Aspect as regeneratrix of the sacred cycle.

Nannar the moongod, for instance, embodied the complete Spectral cycle. While Ningal, wife of Nannar, conceived the successive Spectres of the lunation each daytime when the moon descends into the underworld realm of the goddess. Ninlil (mother of Nannar) gave birth to the lunation; Ningal (wife of Nannar), to the individual phases.

In later pantheons, a distinct Aspect of the goddess couples with each of the seven focal Spectres (the *Seven Sisters,* lunar long before their stellar transposition – scholars insisting ancient allusions to the seven daughters of Atlas, or Seven Hathors of Egypt, refer to the *Pleiades* – which are disproportionately dim).

The triple-goddess elaborates another refinement of the role of the mate of the moongod: *Goddess of Abundance,* emergent Maiden, begetting the waxing arc of the cycle (her progeny increasingly full); the *Goddess of Decrease,* declining Hag, the waning arc (a progressively lean litter); and the *Goddess of Renewal,* paradigm of the Mother, the new lunation.

The goddess is never seen; she remains in the underworld (the white, or lunar, goddess thereby synonymous with the earth-mother goddess in various cultures). The moongod alone is visible. Yet two nights each lunation, he too subsides into the underworld lair of the goddess – the two nights between crescents, without a moon in the sky – a dark interval which provides the key to unlocking the mysteries of ancient myth. This is also the reason the underworld was considered the realm of the goddess: the moon confined there two nights, or half-days, longer than the sun each month.

Our weekday names, as is well known, derive in part from the Scandinavian Germanic correlatives of the gods – Tyw/Tyr, Woten/Odin, Thor and Freyr (twin of Freyja) – with the retention of Saturn, Sun and Moon days; the Romance derivations preserving the putative 'planetary' origins more cogently: *Solis, Luna, Martis, Mercurii, Iovis, Veneris* and *Saturni* (Latin).

Ancient astronomer-priests also conceived a hierarchy of 'terrestrial or subterranean planets' to complement the celestial luminaries: (1) LEAD – Saturn; (2) TIN – Jupiter; (3) IRON – Mars; (4) COPPER – Venus; (5) MERCURY – Mercury; (6) SILVER – Moon; (7) GOLD – Sun. Imposing this arcanum on the week (employing the French names) exhumes a metallic mnemonic of ordinals digressing in threes, with inferior and superior elements at the end of the week juxtaposed to produce a doubled interval (of 6).

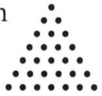
Which memorializes the crucial observance of a prolonged count on the seventh day – *on the seventh day rest,* or count it again: (6) SILVER – *lundi;* (3) IRON – *mardi;* (5) MERCURY – *mercredi;* (2) TIN – *jeudi;* (4) COPPER – *vendredi;* (1) LEAD – *samedi;* (7) GOLD – *dimanche* (Latin *dominica* – a doubled [*do / di*] measure [*minica / manche* incorporating a prefix whose root is *men/man* = "moon"]; *cf, dicho-menia* – 'dividing the month'). An emphatically cyclical mnemonic, in which the sixth element succeeds the seventh. And an ordinal digression (6–3–5–2–4–1–7) which illuminates the succession in the 'planetary' week.

The need to rest on the seventh day arises from the rounded length of a lunation (29.5 days) – the theophany of the final phase in the 29-day month (Hades) demanding a distinct entity as its counterpart for the 30-day month (Pluto, meaning 'wealthy' – by an extra day).

This lunar hierarchy comprises the basis of all ancient scripture and iconography. The moon with its elusive complexities – the broad variabilities in lunation length, together with the protracted measures of the course and phase cycles – subjecting ancient man to its reverent observance for countless millennia before he finally divined the nature of his most sacred divinity (the one who watched over him while he was most vulnerable, during sleep). Faithful observance which rewarded him with the incalculable benefits the god was inclined to bestow; first and foremost: MEASURE.

The moongod, he was convinced, was trying to 'tell' him something by exposing a different face each night, but what? Once ancient man recognized the language his god was speaking – the language of MEASURE – his command of his condition grew divine. And I contend the first glimmer of recognition occurred with the discovery of the relation of diameter to circumference of an idealized half-moon: a length of rope going around a circle of pegs in which it doubled as diameter, three-and-a-little times.

Seven focal Spectres delimit the visible portion of the lunation from waxing crescent to waning crescent, just as the series of integers from 1 to 7 incorporates the greatest number of visible phases in a lunation: $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 = 28$. A presentiment of *divine* affirmation – emphasized in the triangular *perfection* of the number twenty-eight, whose factors protract the whole: $\frac{1}{2}$ of $28 = 14$; $\frac{1}{4} = 7$; $\frac{1}{7} = 4$; $\frac{1}{14} = 2$; $\frac{1}{28} = 1$: $14 + 7 + 4 + 2 + 1 = 28$. **NICK DRUMBOLIS**



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